


# Why Rapport Matters in Therapy

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When it comes to therapy, rapport refers to the relationship between the client and therapist. In many psychological theories rapport is the foundation and cornerstone of the therapy process and without it, progress cannot be made. Rapport includes the connection, the trust, the sharing, the safety, the communication, and the dynamic of a relationship. In order to have a positive and healthy rapport with different people, different characteristics will need to be present. What helps another person to feel that connection may be the exact opposite of what another person needs to feel the connection. Rapport is developed by being genuinely engaged with the client, actively listening, remembering, and showing true empathy. You have to honestly earn that trust and comfort in a relationship.

## Why is Rapport Important?

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Therapy is a hard process and at times uncomfortable. You will have to discuss emotions and experiences that are painful. In order to do this, in order to disclose this information, in order to even reach these points in yourself you must feel safe. When in therapy, how you feel safe is by being in the presence of someone who you can trust and who can maintain that safety when you need it most. This is formed in the relationship through rapport building and development. Some studies have even suggested that therapeutic rapport is more effective in making progress in therapy than any other specific therapy techniques. If rapport is not formed, it is almost impossible for forward progress to be made in therapy. This being said, finding a counselor who you are able to build a healthy rapport with is vital to success and not every client/therapist combination will work. If rapport is not built, it does not mean that a therapist is bad, it just means that they are not the right match. Trying different therapists until that rapport is found is one of the first steps of a successful therapeutic journey.

## How To Build Rapport:

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- **Listen:** active listening skills are the foundation of building healthy rapport. Body language, reassuring gestures and comments, paraphrasing, and remembering what they tell you are all ways to show you are listening. Asking for clarification when you need it is also vital to reduce the feeling that you are only partially listening. Sometimes it is the smallest of details that give us the biggest clue into what is really going on and without actively listening you can miss these and significantly damage the relationship.
- **Respect:** remember that this is a person sitting across from you and they deserve to be treated as one. Showing respect and treating them with the same respect you would of anyone else forms a trusting bond. Do not judge them for what they tell you and accept them for who they are.

- **Empathy:** understanding and showing that you understand what they are feeling will help them to feel heard and cared for, building a solid foundation for rapport. Do not simply sympathize with them, but truly attempt to see things from their side and understand how and why they feel the way they do. Put your self in their shoes.
- **Validation:** telling them that you understand and that what they feel is okay is one of the most important steps in building rapport. They need to know that they are allowed to feel what they feel and that they are safe expressing it to you.
- **Honesty:** this seems obvious, but do not lie to them. It is okay to not share your information, but do not tell them that you have experienced something you have not or that you will do something that you will not or won't do something that you will do. Distrust is the fastest way to deteriorate even a solid therapeutic rapport. Being genuine with your reactions and emotions and honest with your thoughts helps you to be transparent and trustworthy.
- **Competency:** make sure that you are competent and show competency in what you do. This should be common sense but still deserves mention. If you are at a loss for what to do, get help or do research, make yourself competent. Do not make claims to be competent when you are not. If you are not competent to treat a certain issue, be honest, and refer if necessary.
- **Meet at Their Level:** you cannot force someone to start at a level they are not ready for. Build rapport by meeting them where they need you to. If they cannot yet address what you know that they need to, meet them a few steps before that and focus on building the relationship.
- **Pace Progress/Take Small Steps:** focus on all of the steps not just the end result. Move at a pace that is comfortable but pushes enough to be therapeutic. Pushing too fast breaks trust and builds feeling of being unsafe while not pushing enough can make a person feel stalled and cause them to not see you as competent to help them. Finding the right pace for both of you and setting small goals will help show success and build rapport.
- **Self-Disclosure:** when appropriate, self-disclosure shows that you are human and makes you relateable. There needs to be a healthy balance between sharing enough information to make you seem like a real person and to show that you can relate to them and oversharing and changing the dynamic between therapist and client. This takes focus away from them and can cause a mix of emotions and boundary issues.